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Lexington Books

2019-08-27

Miklóssy , K & Smith , H 2019 , Concluding Remarks : In-Between-ness and Strategic Culture . in K Miklossoy & H Smith (eds) , Strategic Culture in Russia's neighborhood: Change and Continuity in an In-Between Space . 1 edn , Lexington Books , New York - London , pp. 259-266 .

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/310430>

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Concluding Remarks: In-Between-ness and Strategic Culture

Katalin Miklóssy and Hanna Smith

The chapters of this book discussed how the strategic cultures of different countries display common characteristics rooted in a special geopolitical space that has been subjected to simultaneous changes over a longer time. Shared historical experiences provide a common ground for perceived outside threats similarly. Traditions and history play a central role in the formulation of strategic interests. The various and ever-changing interpretations of history can be detected through time and among the different subgroups formulating security conceptions, providing a fluctuation also within the realm of strategic culture. Even more importantly, the warehouse of history in any one nation is limited, hence, there is a limitation on interpretations, and in the end, on the options of strategic culture. History and cultural traditions produced also constraints on institutional change. Hence, for example, while NATO and EU memberships have anchored many countries of our region to Western institutions, nevertheless, they have not nullified underlining core policy preferences that could even run counter with Western institutional responsibilities.

This is a puzzling aspect in regard to the first generation of strategic culture theorists who represented a determinist position, even if history was a key element in their analysis too. The second generation's claims seem also somewhat contradictory in comparison to our findings. For the second generation there was no linkage between strategic culture and state behavior since behavior was dependent on the political elites' interests and interest, not strategic culture, would define strategic choices. Subsequently, the elites everywhere have similar militaristic and *realpolitik* views, and they try to stay in power by using same kind of strategic

discourses, where ‘us’ are threatened by external ‘them’.¹ The chapters in this volume show, however, that even if in many cases the political elite backs their interests with historical cases suited to their interest, the strategic culture of that particular country offers a limited frame for what those interests can be and, therefore, goes often against the expected logic of interest-based behavior. The third generation of strategic culture brings into the debate the role of organizational culture stating that there is a connection between thought and action, and discourse has behavioral consequences. Johnston defined strategic culture as “*an integrated system of symbols which acts to establish pervasive and long-lasting grand strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs*”². This means that strategic culture can be created by the political elite through narrative injection. The chapters in this book support this statement to a certain extent, nevertheless, they also argue that not any narrative is possible. Changes in the strategic culture are indeed embedded into the historical memory and geographical location of the country.

Alan Bloomfield’s suggestion that strategic culture contained multiple co-existing strategic sub-cultures representing a different interpretation of a state’s international context gets confirmation from the chapters in this volume. However, Bloomfield does not explain how these groups have been formed. The chapters here provide an explanation in this matter and accentuate particularly two specific factors: the sense of in-between-ness and the role of neighbors, here, being situated in the Russian neighborhood. These are crucial factors if we want to understand better countries’ strategic behavior and what are realistic expectations of the effects of integration and socialization.

Maneuvering in the In-Between Space

The case studies of this volume offer a new insight into the significance of the in-between space which generates regional identities. This in-between-ness expresses itself differently in different cases but is a strong driver in building strategic culture. In-between-ness is an old concept, as we pinpointed in the introduction of this volume. Ever since sir Harold Mackinder, the notion helped to assess bipolar geopolitical power-relations and was analyzed from the perspective of the idea of the buffer-zone and/or the sphere of influence. The buffer zone indicates also a competitive situation where the juxtapositioned powers challenge each other for the control of the territory. The in-between space marked by a bipolar constellation creates a limited horizon, *per se*. In addition, the countries in this sphere are unable to change their in-between situation. In academic literature this subject position has been investigated from various sets of interlinked theories related to small states³, the center-periphery construct⁴ and the shelter theory.⁵

We made three observations based on the chapters of this book: 1) the in-between position *complicates and brings an element of unpredictability* into strategic behavior of the countries; 2) in-between-ness is a *valuable strategic position* that opens up a great variety of possibilities; and 3) and these countries *develop resembling strategies and regional identities*.

According to our first observation, the in-between position complicates and brings an element of unpredictability into policy making. Since the in-between existence displays a shifting between two poles of gravity, the different subgroups can understand and translate this fluctuation divergently. They may display different priorities regarding which pole should be favored in the formulation of strategic goals. Hence, the question is which party is able to

secure dominant political positions. Many of the countries in this volume have “surprised” outside observers due to the way their political culture has fluxed since the fall of the Soviet Union. Ukraine, Hungary, Moldova and Bulgaria can be mentioned as prime examples here.

Our second observation is that in-between-ness is a valuable strategic position that opens up a great variety of possibilities. In-between-ness can be seen simultaneously as a security hazard and a strategic potential. The knowledge of being situated in a buffer zone or sphere of influence has undoubtedly a strong impact on security conceptions, language and culture of the countries in-between. The concepts of buffer zone and spheres of influence strongly indicate outsiders’ views towards small and medium size countries in great power politics. In contrast, the in-between position is something that the countries construct themselves. In-between-ness produces a consciousness of double options the juxta-positioned poles’ competition offers. When competing to gain influence over a territory the competitors have to present benefits for the countries to be willing to group up with them. The poles’ competition does not require or push the countries necessarily to choose between them but opens up a possibility to skillfully play with two sets of cards. This type of strategic behavior comes up in many of this book’s articles. Some of the best examples are perhaps the way how Belarus, Moldova or Hungary are acting or how Turkey’s political elite has used the possibility to choose a dominant sub-culture. There are also dangers in this “game” as the Ukrainian example has shown.

The third observation is that since the in-between position concerns several national entities situated in the same geography – these countries develop resembling strategies and in some cases regional identities when coming to terms with the limitations, threats and advantages of their geographical space. This shared experience of navigating between this double

orientation – for a relatively long time, in some cases even over centuries – can be detected in the common features in the individual countries' strategic culture. In other words, there are inevitably elements that are regionally coded. Regionality, furthermore, does not influence only the countries' foreign policy agenda and alliances but it also affects decisions regarding domestic matters and even profound societal choices. Common action based on regional identification can improve the individual countries' negotiating position. The examples in this book show this in rather interesting ways. Nordic countries are all very different and have different security solutions, but they maneuver inside of the Nordic-ness and can even create policies independently, although not in contradiction to alliances like NATO or membership like the EU. Similarities are found also in the cases of Baltic states and Visegrad-states. Regional alliances were seen as important to maintain even if the countries were members of wider communities of the NATO and the EU. The regional context provides the individual countries wider elbowroom than the international organizations. Also, outside the organizational umbrellas, regionality gives a framework which strengthens sovereignty, like in the case of Serbia.

Regionality, on the other hand, can also be activated in times of security breaches in the immediate environment, as for instance is the case in the Black Sea countries. The Black Sea is a special geopolitical cross-road of multiple embedded great power interests. There are more dimensions interacting here than only East vs. West, which is why the countries concentrate, generally, on the wider strategic possibilities this area offers. In-between-ness becomes relevant only in crisis situations of great powers clashes when there is an urge to choose one's side.

Regionality does not only provide a context but also conditions development. Regionality creates a mediating level where the international arena and the national sphere interact. It offers an extra leverage and greater variety of possibilities for the countries to maneuver their national interests.

In the neighborhood of Russia

The factor of neighborhood clearly plays an important part in the formation of different sub-cultures' strategies. The in-between-ness and the regional aspect can be investigated from the perspective of one of the poles which creates a special angle to the neighborhood. The most important question in this regard is what kind of identity the countries in the in-between sphere have. In the case of Russia, the countries in Russia's neighborhood have not always been fully independent, sovereign countries. This is due partly to Russia being a great power, and partly to how Russia has defined its role in international politics, what its security concerns and economic interests are. Part of Russia being a great-power has involved, as Jeremy Smith wrote in his chapter, a feeling of responsibility for its neighborhood. This Russian sense of duty has been interpreted differently in different countries shaping their strategic culture. Often when Russia's responsibility has activated, it has raised security concerns in its neighborhood, as for example in the case of the Ukraine crisis. As Jeremy Smith observed, "The idea of such a responsibility can be traced back to the doctrine of 'Moscow as the Third Rome' and subsequent messianism arising in the fifteenth century". This means that for centuries Russia's interpretation of its role in the neighborhood has also inevitably penetrated into the strategic culture of its neighbors. Accordingly, when analyzing strategic culture we have to take into consideration not only the individual country's threat

perceptions and historical continuities of understanding the enemy but also how its neighbors see themselves.

From the perspective of long-durée history, the countries in Russia's neighborhood have developed survival strategies to come to terms the best they can with the Russian influence that has threatened their independent existence for centuries. Part of the survival strategies have been balancing between threat and opportunity. Even acute threats from Russia did not exclude the simultaneously existing advantages Russia can offer, as for instance in the cases of Hungary, Moldova and Belarus presented in this book.

It is also clear that the balance between different sub-cultures as well as significant changes in a country's strategic culture can come from shocks that are caused by outside actors. This is particularly clear when it comes to the Russian neighborhood. Russian actions and developments have strong effects on its neighbors. The Georgian war in 2008, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 changed Lithuanian and Latvian policies. Similarly, the fall of the Soviet Union had a dramatic impact on the Nordic countries' policy formulation. Furthermore, today Ukraine and Russia are further apart than ever and it remains to be seen if Ukraine's historical position between East and West, Russia and the rest of Europe, will be balanced or will the crisis permanently alter Ukrainian strategic culture, away from Russia. This would confirm Bloomfield's argument and also our first observation mentioned above, that as a result of various shocks, one or another sub-culture might surface and prevail in the discourse, thus leading to shifts in the dominant view on national security and military power.⁶

In Conclusion

Strategic culture is closely interlinked with the idea of national interests in a spatial context that is defined by potential threats, perceptions of friends and foes, traditions of alliances, and institutional linkages. The contributions of the different cases showed that the in-between space as a regional option becomes valuable in times of international shocks, modest challenges or when the countries experience pressure from the center they are institutionally attached to. In times of immediate security breach, however, the regional dimension does not offer a shelter, therefore, the countries strengthen their relations to the security provider center.

The role of a powerful neighbor, in this case Russia, is also very significant when it comes to the interplay between the different sub-cultures. In the countries that rely on strong historical and symbolic bonds of Slavic brotherhood – Belarus, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Serbia – the power elites exploited the in-between position and Russia in their domestic battles for power. Furthermore, the threat of Russia has also been played out in the international context, in order to secure a more beneficial position within international organizations, as in the Polish case, thus, blurring sometimes the line between real threat, potential threat and no threat at all.

The chapters in this book have shown that the analysis of strategic culture focusing solely on the position of leadership, have missed an important element: namely the geographical position in-between two opposite poles and the role of neighbors.

Notes:

¹ Bradley Klein, "Hegemony and Strategic Culture: American Power Projection and Alliance Defence Politics," *Review of International Studies* 14, no 2. (April 1988): 133–48.

² Alastair, Iain Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture," *International Security* Vol. 19, No. 4 (Spring, 1995): 32–64. Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton University Press 1995).

³ Bjol Erling, "The Power of the Weak," *Cooperation and Conflict* 3, no. 2 (1968): 157–68. Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, "'What's the Use of It?': Danish Strategic Culture and the Utility of Armed Force," *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association* 40, no.1 (2005): 68. Peter Katzenstein, *Small States in World Markets* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985). David Vital, *The Inequality of States: A Study of the Small Power in International Relations* (Oxford: Greenwood, 1980). Franz von Däniken, "Is the Notion of Small State Still Relevant?" in *Small States inside and outside the European Union*, ed. Laurent Goetschel (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998), 43–48. Olav F. Knudsen, "Analysing Small-State Security: The Role of External Factors," in *Small States and the Security Challenge in the New Europe*, eds. Werner Bauweins and Armand Clesse and Olav Knudsen (London – Washington: Brassey's, 1996), 3–20. Robert Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968). Robert Keohane, "'Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics," *International Organisation* 23, no. 2 (1969), 210–291. Laurent Goetschel, "The Foreign and Security Policy Interest of Small States in Today's Europe," in *Small States*, ed. Goetschel (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998), 13–31. Jeanne A. K. Hey, "Introducing Small State Foreign Policy," in *Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior*, ed. Jeanne A. K. Hey (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 1–12.

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- ⁴ John Agnew, *Geopolitics. Revisioning World Politics*. (London-New York: Routledge, 1998), 32–33. Raymond Vernon, ‘International Trade and International Investment in the Product Cycle,’ *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 80, (1966), 190–207. Johan Galtung, *Peace and World Structure. Essays in Peace Research*. Vol. IV (Copenhagen: Eljers, 1980). Galtung, *The True Worlds. A Transnational Perspective* (New York: Free Press, 1980). Katalin Miklóssy, “Khrushchevism after Khrushchev: The Rise of National Interest in the Eastern Bloc,” in *Khrushchev in the Kremlin: Policy and Government in the Soviet Union, 1953–1964*, eds. Jeremy Smith and Melanie Ilic (London – New York: Routledge, 2010a), 150–70. Miklóssy ‘Crossing boundaries in the East during the Cold War’, in *The East and the Idea of Europe*, eds. Katalin Miklóssy and Pekka Korhonen (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 69–91.
- ⁵ Baldur Thorhallson (ed.), *Small States and Shelter Theory: Iceland’s External Affairs* (London – New York: Routledge, 2019). Alyson J.K. Bailes, Bradley A. Thayer and Baldur Thorhallson, “Alliance theory and alliance ‘Shelter’: the complexities of small state behavior,” *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 1, no. 1 (2016): 9–26.
- ⁶ Bloomfield, Alan. “Time to Move on: Reconceptualizing the Strategic Culture Debate.” *Contemporary Security Policy* 30, no. 3 (2012): 437–61.

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